End of Year Lists: The 10 Best Games on Xbox in 2021

Community NerdyBirdy Dec 30, 2021

We've finally arrived at the moment we've all been waiting for. It's time to list the best games to come out on Xbox in 2021. The ultimate category of our end of year lists, this edition features a diverse lineup of games, from long-awaited releases, to under-the-radar surprises.

Of course, no list could conclusively claim to list the best games of any console. We realize that every player will have their own personal preference on what game is best for them. Rather than be seen as a definitive ranking, this list simply showcases some of the incredible storytelling, dazzling design and groundbreaking creativity that's possible on the Xbox platform.

10. Guardians of the Galaxy

At first glance, Marvel's Guardians of the Galaxy might seem an odd choice for one of the best games of the year. The pared down game offers no-frills gameplay with no multiplayer, no microtransactions, and a rather straightforward design. Clocking in at under 20 hours on average, Guardians of the Galaxy features none of the expansive open-world maps, or extended quests that have become popular among recent action games.

Image: Square Enix

Instead, it relies on a trusted formula of a strong single-player campaign, entertaining combat mechanics, and a light-hearted approach to storytelling, that gives Guardians of the Galaxy an always enjoyable gaming experience.

9. Genesis Noir

Narrative based story games will always divide gaming audiences. There are those who are drawn to their deep emotionally resonant storylines and beautiful artistic designs. Then there are those who don’t consider them to be real gaming experiences. It’s probably not worth trying to convince either side of the opposing view. But if you are drawn to narrative adventures, there are few games out there more unique or original than Genesis Noir.

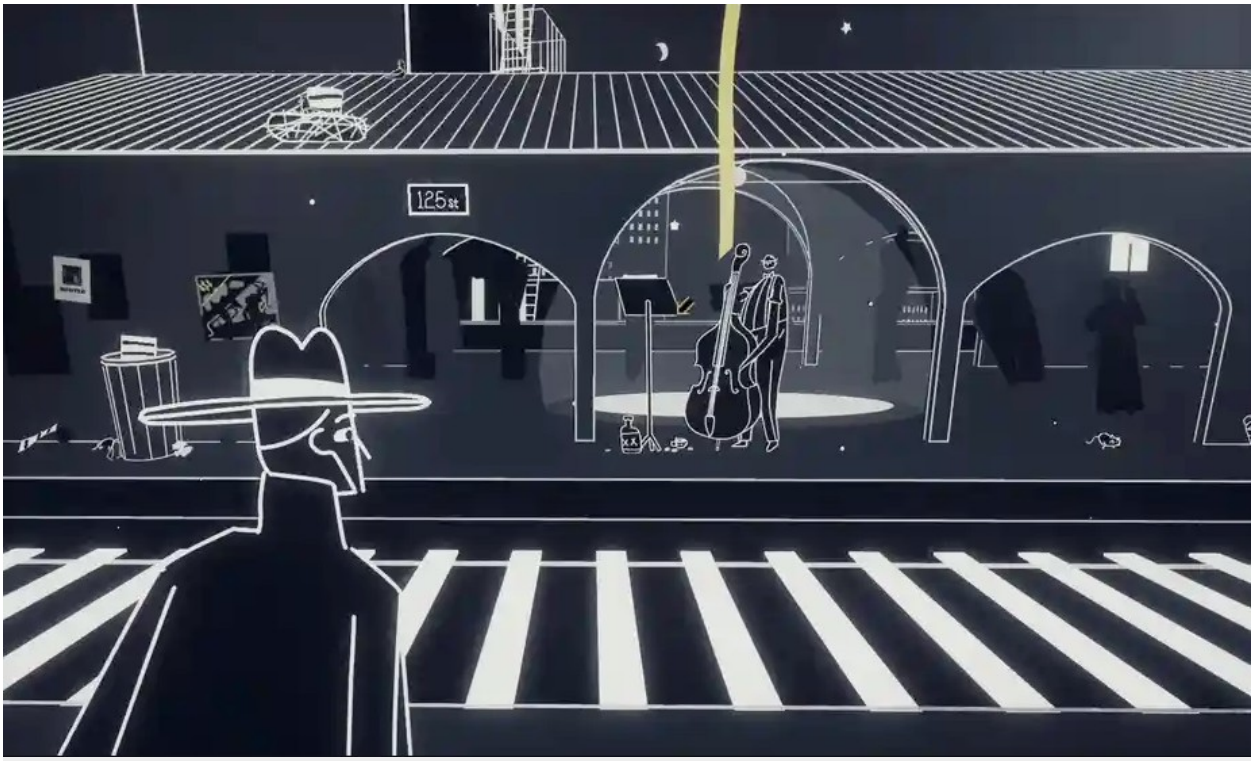

Image: Fellow Traveller

Genesis Noir takes you on an adventure through time and space where you confront questions such as the meaning and nature of existence, as well as the impacts of the individual decisions of our lives. The art style is stunning, and backed by a great jazz-centered soundtrack. It may not be for everyone, but fans of story-based games will find a lot to love in Genesis Noir.

8. Knockout City

Some gamers love to engross themselves in a game with rich storylines, intricate plots and colossal symphonic soundtracks. Others, just want to blow things up with their friends.

Image: Electronic Arts

If you’re of the latter, you’ll love Knockout City, a game that takes on the childhood classic of dodgeball. The premise of the game is simple, try to knock out the other team first by clobbering them with a varied array of different colored balls. But the gameplay is surprisingly complex. Strategy and tactics will be just as critical as fast reflexes as you explore different throws, dodges and stage obstacles.

Knockout City may seem simple and basic, but it’s one of the best team PvP games to release in years, and sure to bring hours of fun to you and your friends.

7. Resident Evil Village

After so many iterations, you might think the Resident Evil franchise was out of ideas, but Resident Evil Village shows that there are still plenty of innovations to be made within the horror survival genre. Resident Evil Village builds off the traditional survival horror elements of the franchise while introducing more action-oriented fighting and gameplay.

Image: Capcom

The game also takes place within a Victorian Era Eastern European village, where you'll use typewriters instead of computers to save, and fight haunted aristocrats and werewolves and monsters. Set three years after the events of Resident Evil 7, Resident Evil Village will have you control Ethan Winters as you fight to rescue your daughter and avenge your family. Along the way you'll encounter characters such as Lady Dimitrescu, who quickly emerged as one of the franchise's most popular characters.

6. Halo Infinite

The sixth installment of the beloved Halo series, Halo Infinite returns super-soldier Master Chief back to the battleground. However, unlike previous editions of Halo, Halo Infinite's multiplayer is separate from the game, and free-to-play. Halo Infinite covers only the single-player campaign which now takes place within a semi-open-world environment.

Image: Xbox Game Studios

Taking inspiration from other open-world games such as Zelda’s Breath of the Wild, Halo Infinite offers greater control to the player to explore the environment on their own. Halo Infinite also contains light RPG elements such as a skill tree and ability customizations. The game also introduces completely new control features such as the Grapple Shot and Thruster, which allows the player to quickly pull himself towards enemies as well as retrieve items.

With greater depth and focus on the single-player campaign, Halo Infinite is a fresh look at the Halo franchise and won critical praise for its new wrinkles and innovations.

5. Sable

At first glance, Sable might not sound like a particularly exciting game. It features no combat, no fail-state, and depends entirely on exploration of a vast open-world environment. But for those interested in a laid-back story centered on discovery and personal growth, Sable may end up being your favorite game of the year.

Image: Raw Fury

Sable takes you into the life of a young woman about to undergo a rite of passage on her desert planet. As part of your adventure, you'll spend many hours riding your hoverbike, exploring vast canyons and deserts, and completing tasks and quests for different characters.

At every stage of the game, you'll be treated to a gorgeous game design based off the art style of French artist Moebius. And to top it off, the soundtrack was composed by Grammy-nominated indie sensation Japanese Breakfast. Sable's received favorable critical acclaim and was nominated for Best Debut Indie Game at the Game Awards in 2021.

4. Hitman 3

The third edition of the Hitman franchise of third-person stealth games, Hitman 3 brings new feature locations, as well as a rich and engrossing story. You'll control Agent 47 once more as he carries out his missions in locales like Berlin, Chongqing, Mendoza or Dubai. While Hitman 3 contains no multi-player modes, the game was still lauded for expansive world-building and imaginative gameplay and mechanics.

Image: IO Interactive

The game would later receive “PC Game of the Year” from the Golden Joystick Awards in 2021 and was widely considered one of the year’s best games.

3. Psychonauts 2

The sequel that nearly never happened, Psychonauts 2 carries on the story of Raz, a young acrobat who’s learning to their psychic abilities to prevent other psychics from using their powers for evil. With a new cast of characters including voice actors such as Jack Black and Elijah Wood, Psychonauts 2 is more than just another gaming sequel. It’s an exciting new foray that combines witty and imaginative gameplay with a rich story line that’s unafraid to tackle heavier topics such as mental health.

Image: Xbox Game Studios

Much like its predecessor, Psychonauts 2 was critically acclaimed and won Xbox Game of the Year at the Golden Joystick Awards in 2021 along with positive reviews from publications such as The Guardian, VentureBeat and IGN.

2. Forza Horizon 5

Set in a fictional representation of Mexico, Forza Horizon 5 brings its racing mechanics to a massive open world environment with more maps and geographic diversity than any other installment of the Forza Horizon series. From active caldera volcanoes to verdant jungles and pristine beaches, Forza Horizon 5 has an incredible array of racing locations.

Image: Playground Games

Players in the game can freely explore the open world, compete in races in the campaign mode, or race in multiplayer races. There's also a new system of mini-multiplayer games across the map called the Horizon Arcade. Players can also use the EventLab to create their own custom races and games.

Forza Horizon 5 launched to the largest initial gaming audience of any Xbox Game Studios game in history. More than ten million people played the game during the game's first week of release, and the game would go on to win three awards at the Game Awards in 2021.

1. It Takes Two

One of the rare two-player only games, It Takes Two does not have a single-player option, all players must either play online or with a local split-screen co-op between two players. The emphasis on teamwork influences the gameplay as inter-player cooperation is required for players to progress through the different levels and worlds of the game.

Described as a "romantic comedy" by the game's designers, the game's development team worked to ensure that the gameplay always had a connection to the story. As the narrative arc of the story changes, so do the gameplay mechanics. It Takes Two won rave reviews and was nominated for

six awards at the 2021 The Game Awards, winning three of them, including Game of the Year.

Image: Electronic Arts

Each year brings its own new excitement in gaming. There are new storylines to discover, new campaigns to complete and new scenarios to master. 2021 was no different. Here we've outlined some of the top games we've seen this year. What are some of your favorite games to release in the last year? Let us know in the comments below!